

April 5, 1990

### The Circle of Friends:

It has been over two years now since Issan and I and the HSZC community began our hospice program for people living with AIDS. Our vision was clear: 1) to create a supportive and home-like environment to take care of our friends in their "life and death" struggle with the AIDS virus, 2) to extend our sphere of friends to include all those who need this kind of help and 3) to encourage others to help. But even in those first dark hours after JD arrived, we began to encounter the harsh realities of those living with AIDS in their last few months of life.

At first we didn't realize the complications that can and too often do arise; and we didn't understand the lack of resources available for people at this critical time of their lives. In many cases they are abandoned. They simply do not fit into any of the existing "medical" categories for care. They do not need to be hospitalized but cannot receive the 24 hour care at home that they need. In many cases they are at the end of their financial reserves, having fought the disease for many months or even years; their own friends have often died and they are now in desperate need themselves.

By coming to the help of our friends we discovered a way to help more and more people; and have found the courage to extend our practice into this unknown and frightening territory. But because of our unconventional approach, which includes living and dying together in the same house, caring for each other whether we are sick or well, and deciding not to hand the crisis over to the professional institutions, we are unable to realistically fundraise in conventional ways. For example, it has been suggested by one of the largest funding institutions for AIDS activity in the Bay area that we may not be "financially viable" because we cannot obtain a state AIDS health care license, even though the regulations are so restrictive that only one license has been given in the entire state, (and we have heard that they could only get their license through political pull in Washington).

We are providing a critical service to the city, accepting people in our program that would otherwise be abandoned to the county hospitals at great expense or would be living and dying on the streets of San Francisco, and yet we can not get and have not gotten any funding from governmental agencies. We are living and working with people caught in the "gap". It is clear now that if we are to continue providing this kind of care, the financial help must come from people and not institutions.

When friends are dying there is no time to wait for "financial viability"; it's time to do what is necessary and to do it as well as possible. We didn't have time to work out the ideal plan or to wait for appropriate funding. We have worked from where we are, with what we have, without apology or embarrassment, but it continues to be a difficult and demanding task. The work is deep and rewarding. But we need help!

We are asking you and your friends to join Maitri's "Circle of Friends". We have created three categories of membership: 1) an annual donation of \$100 to join the "Friends Circle" 2) an annual donation of \$1,000 to join the "Silver Circle" and 3) an annual donation of \$5,000 or more to join the "Golden Circle". Last year 59 people joined "The Circle of Friends" including six who became members of the "Golden Circle" and thirteen who became members of the "Silver Circle".

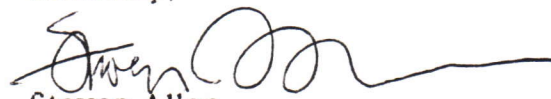
Fundraising with our friends is continuing in many ways. This year's fundraising drive began with a "Poetry Reading" Benefit on March 4th, featuring Allen Ginsberg, Philip Whalen, Diane DiPrima, Judy Grahn, and Nathaniel Mackey, and was co-sponsored by the American Voices Poetry Series of USF. The next spring event will be the 2nd annual Auction-Dance Benefit on May 12th at Fort Mason from 6:30 pm to Midnight. This year will include new additions: live music and a buffet dinner, prepared by the staff of Campton Place Restaurant. Please come if you are in the area.

We are proud to announce that Ram Dass has joined our Community Advisory Board this year and is helping with our fundraising efforts.

We are also proud to announce that Sharon Kehoe's video "The Story of Maitri Hospice" is now available. It's a beautiful 28 min. documentary on the founding of Maitri, the first Buddhist AIDS Hospice program in America. There are many moving passages with Issan and the other members of the hospice staff, including interviews with nurses, doctors, attendants, volunteers and residents in the program. If you are interested in a copy they are available through us for \$22.50.

So please join with Allen Ginsberg, Ram Dass, Issan and myself and the many friends of Maitri by becoming a member of "The Circle of Friends". Your help is making it possible for us to continue this important work.

Sincerely,

  
Steven Allen  
Maitri Director